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ABSTRACT

The intent of this paper is to illustrate that within the feminist movement there are sub groups that have to be examined if the movement is to be successful. With the heightened consciousness of women across the nation and the increased competition for the scarce number of well-paying, meaningful jobs, it is important that minorities understand not only each other, but also the scope and implications of the feminist movement. Sexism has been of secondary importance to ethnic minority women because of the overshadowing effects of the racist behavior they have been forced to endure. A woman is not just seen as a female in the labor market, but is perceived as part of a specific racial group. If unemployment rates for Black teenagers are examined separately, it is apparent that this group is even more severely disadvantaged than minority teenagers as a whole. If individual income is examined, it is found that minority women are at the bottom of the ladder. Such examples illustrate that in the labor market the problems of ethnic minorities (women) are compounded. Extensive research is needed in order to gain significant data in areas such as those discussed. This information is also relevant with respect to the formulation of strategies and the implementation of programs in the struggle for women's rights. (Author/JM)

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A WOMAN IS NOT JUST A FEMALE[1]

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INTRODUCTION

With the heightened consciousness of women across the nation and the increased competition among minorities for the scarce number of well-paying, meaningful jobs, it is important that minorities understand not only each other but also the scope and implications of the feminist movement. The intent of this paper is to illustrate that within the feminist movement there are subgroups that have to be examined if the movement is to be successful.

The fact that ethnic minority women have had a different cultural, social, and economic experience than white women makes it imperative that the diversities between minority and nonminority women be realized, accepted, and dealt with in the appropriate manner--the manner that will assure the most equitable results for all.

There is no implicit or explicit implication in this discussion that the eradication of sexism should not be achieved by the most expeditious method possible. Nor is there any implication that the goal of eliminating sexism does not have great merit. However, without an understanding of the concerns and priorities of ethnic minority women, unnecessary confusion and devisiveness may arise.

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[1]This is a revised version of a paper presented by the author in the Women and Careers Workshop part of the Third Annual California Conference of Women's Equity Action League (WEAL), November 10, 1973.

In discussing the subject of employment discrimination, many feminists have drawn analogies concerning the experiences of racism and sexism and thus have likened their plight to that of ethnic minorities and the discrimination they have faced and are currently encountering in the labor market.

For analytical purposes and as a means for better enabling us to conceptualize sexism and its effects, analogies between sexism and racism do have merit. However, while there are many incidents of racism and sexism which appear to parallel one another, it is a grave mistake for one to conclude that the repression against women is or has been the same as the repression against ethnic minorities in this country. To suggest that white women have experienced the same prejudice and repression as ethnic minorities with respect to employment indicates a lack of understanding about the nature of racism and its devastating effects upon economic activity.

The visible ethnic minority groups--the Asians, Chicanos, Native Americans, and Blacks--have had a unique history in America. They have been exploited, abused, dehumanized, and killed because of the color of their skin. America expressed its repugnance for the above-mentioned minority groups, while simultaneously exploiting them as a cheap labor source. Racism and oppression have traditionally been synonymous with good business practice for America.

This history has resulted in concerns by ethnic minority women that are different from those for nonminority women. For example, Black women have not only had to fight against stereotypical woman images, but in addition have had to resist erroneous depictions of a Black matriarchy or a "Sapphire" personality.[2]

Thus sexism has been of secondary importance to ethnic minority women because of the overshadowing effects of the racist behavior they have been forced to endure. It is my contention that a woman is not just seen as a female in the labor market, but is perceived as part of

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[2]Though there are many different opinions as to how and where the term "Sapphire" originated, it is generally acknowledged that it denotes a Black woman who is aggressive, belligerent, and loud. These characteristics are alleged to be often utilized in attempts to emasculate Black men.

a specific racial group. What she is, what she becomes, how she views the world, and the treatment she is accorded are all to a large degree the result of experiences as part of a racial group.

The following examples illustrate the minority woman's unalterable position as first being identified as an ethnic minority.

- o The Japanese population in the United States was allowed the distinct privilege of graduating from high school behind barbed wire while in concentration camps. Japanese women shared in this distinction not because they were women, but because they were Japanese.
- o Chicano students have been designated by various school systems throughout the Southwest as mentally retarded, after the administration of standardized I.Q. tests. Chicano females are included in this designation because of their Spanish-speaking background, and not because they are females.
- o Black females have been denied admission to southern universities and colleges, and have been denied career and social mobility--first because they were Black, and perhaps second, because they were female.
- o Indian boys and girls are today being shipped to the Indian schools miles away from their homes and families because they are Indian--not because of their sex classification.

The list of such examples is endless.

The differential impact of prejudice against a minority woman begins quite early in her job career. Though the unemployment rate is high for all teenagers, unemployment among teenagers (in the 16-19 age group) is most severe for girls of minority races. 1971 statistics show an unemployment rate for minority teenage girls of 33.8 percent. Minority boys are the next most disadvantaged with a 29 percent rate. These figures compare to a rate for white girls of 14.7 percent and an unemployment rate for white boys of 14.6 percent.[3]

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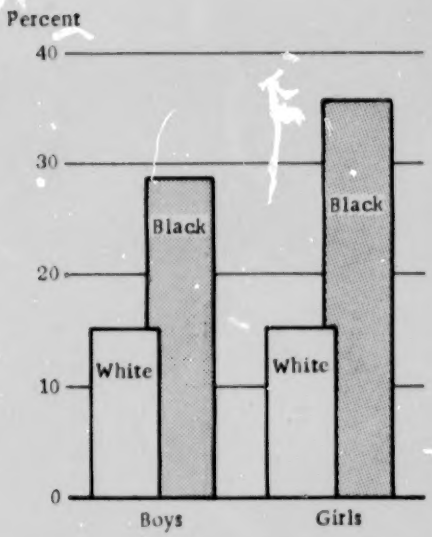
[3] *Manpower Report of the President*, U.S. Department of Labor, March 1972, p. 82.

If unemployment rates for Black teenagers are examined separately, it is apparent that this group is even more severely disadvantaged than minority teenagers as a whole. In 1971 Black teenagers had an overall unemployment rate of 32 percent. For Black girls the rate was 36 percent, and for Black boys the unemployment rate was 29 percent.[4]

The following chart dramatically illustrates these unemployment differentials for Black teenagers.

Black teenage girls have a higher unemployment rate than black boys and more than double the rate for white girls



Unemployment rates for teenagers, 16 to 19, 1971

Source: Department of Labor

[4] Ibid., p. 34.

For adults 20 years of age and over, the rank order holds constant.[5]

	1971	1972
Minority Women	8.7 percent	8.8 percent
Minority Men	7.2 percent	6.8 percent
White Women	5.3 percent	4.9 percent
White Men	4.0 percent	3.6 percent

Data that appear to illustrate the impact of both racism and sexism are as follows. In 1971, of white families headed by women, 27 percent are defined as poor; of Black families headed by women, 54 percent are [illegible]2 data show a decrease in the percentage of such families to [illegible] for white female-headed families and a decrease of one percentage point to 53 percent for Black families.[6] In comparison, figures for families headed by white males in 1971 and 1972 are 6 and 5 percent, respectively. For families headed by Black males, the figures were 17 percent for 1971 and 16 percent for 1972.[7]

If we look at individual income, we again find that minority women are at the bottom of the ladder. Figures for median income in 1972 for persons 14 years old and over who were year-round full-time workers are as follows:[8]

White Males	10,918
Black Males	7,373
White Females	6,172
Black Females	5,280

These figures may appear to indicate that, as some recent literature has suggested, the impact of sexism is more severe than the impact of

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[5] *The Social and Economic Status of the Black Population in the U.S., 1972*, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, p. 39.

[6] Ibid., p. 29.

[7] Ibid.

[8] *Current Population Reports*, "Money Income in 1972 of Families and Persons in the U.S.," Series P-60, No. 87, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, June 1972, p. 5.

racism on earnings.[9] The fact is that at this time there is insufficient research to adequately support or refute this contention. It is not often considered, however, that an important factor in earning rates is longevity in the labor market. White women have the least longevity and continuity in the labor market. Black women tend to remain in the labor market longer and more consistently. The fact that white women have the least longevity of any group in the labor market would tend to refute statements that because the median income for Black males is higher than that of women both Black and white, that this is an indication of the more severe impact of sexism. To attain a more accurate picture, it will be necessary to examine earning levels for males and females of both races with comparable age, education, and longevity in the labor market.[10]

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[9]Literature that supports this position include Rosalind Loring and Theodora Wells, *Breakthrough: Women Into Management*, Van Nostrand-Reinhold Co., New York, 1972, especially Chap. 5; and Mary Townsend Hamilton, "Sex and Income Inequality Among the Employed," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 409, September 1973, p. 49.

[10]A complete discussion of this subject is found in an article by Duran Bell, Jr., "Residential Location, Economic Performance, and Public Employment," in *Patterns of Racial Discrimination*, Vol. 1, George von Furnstenkey, Bennett Harrison, and A. R. Horowitz (eds.), D. C. Heath & Co., Lexington, Massachusetts, 1974.

CONCLUSION

Why is it important for these data to be known? These data and the aforementioned issues are certainly not meant to negate the fact that sexism can be vicious and oppressive. Nor is there an implication that sexism deserves less attention. These examples *do*, however, illustrate that in the labor market the problems of ethnic minorities (women) are compounded. Further, these examples point to the need for extensive research in order to gain significant data in the areas discussed. This information is also relevant with respect to the formulation of strategies and the implementation of programs in the struggle for women's rights.

My concern and the thrust behind my remarks is to point out the necessity of insuring that the feminist movement does not follow the same pattern that America has practiced in oppressing ethnic minorities and exploiting the powerless in the quest for economic gains. Today, for example, many professional Black women have expressed some apprehension that the Federal Women's Program, established in 1967, appears to be mainly directed toward the educated white middle-class woman with little or no concern for the upgrading of minority women or women in the lower grades of the Federal civil service. Similarly, in the much needed push in institutions of higher education for more women faculty members, the idea of the ethnic minority woman as a qualified academician has been obscured. Those in the struggle for women's rights and those involved in the feminist movement must be aware of the unique problems minority women face so that the pattern of exploitation and separation will not be repeated and equal rights and opportunities will exist for all women.

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